

**STATEMENT OF JOHN PARSONS, ASSOCIATE REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR LANDS, RESOURCES AND PLANNING, NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 318, TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO STUDY THE SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF DESIGNATING THE CASTLE NUGENT FARMS LOCATED ON ST. CROIX, VIRGIN ISLANDS, AS A UNIT OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM.**

**February 16, 2006**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 318, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to study the suitability and feasibility of designating Castle Nugent Farms on St. Croix, Virgin Islands, as a unit of the National Park System.

The Department does not oppose H.R. 318, if amended as described in this testimony.

This study would provide an opportunity to determine the appropriate way to preserve and interpret resources associated with the plantation period in the Virgin Islands. The National Park Service (NPS) currently manages three units on the island of St. Croix - Christiansted National Historic Site, Buck Island Reef National Monument, and Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve. In a time of tight budgets and a refocusing on the core mission of the National Park Service (NPS), we believe that funding should be directed first toward completing the 25 previously authorized studies.

In light of the President's commitment to devote more resources to maintaining existing units of the National Park System, we have made an effort to curtail taking on new responsibilities. For this reason, we believe any study should evaluate all alternatives for

preservation and interpretation, including what role, if any, might best be played by the NPS or other partners. We recommend that H.R. 318 be amended to specify that the study explore all options. Our proposed amendment is attached to this testimony.

The NPS is in various stages of progress on 25 studies previously authorized by Congress, 17 of which are being funded through the special resource study budget. We transmitted three studies in FY 2005, and there are seven studies in the transmittal process. Our highest priority is to complete these pending studies, though we expect to start newly authorized studies as soon as funds are made available. We estimate that the costs of completing this study will be approximately \$250,000 to \$350,000.

H.R. 318 would direct the Secretary to carry out a study of the Castle Nugent Farms, which consists of approximately 1,400-acres located on the arid southeastern shore of St. Croix. The property is believed to be the largest parcel of privately held land in the U. S. Virgin Islands.

The farm's rolling terrain consists of a mixture of dry forest, native vegetation, and rangeland that slopes down from an elevation of 750 feet to the sea, fronting on a coastline that includes cobble beaches. One of the largest and healthiest fringing coral reef systems in the Virgin Islands extends only a few hundred feet offshore. The property also provides nesting areas for sea turtles, blackcrowned night herons, and a host of other migrating and resident birds.

Castle Nugent Farms has a long and diverse history of farming dating back to the 1730's when the property was first established as a cotton and sugar plantation after the Danish West Indies Company purchased St. Croix from France. For many years, sugar cane, indigo, and cotton were the main crops.

After Emancipation in 1848, the plantation began breeding N'Dama cattle, which had earlier been brought to St. Croix from Africa. This breed was a prominent part of the farm's operations until the 1960s when attention shifted towards raising an N'Dama cross breed of cattle known as Senepol. Introduced to Castle Nugent Farms in 1957 the Senepol breed has been able to flourish due to its tolerance to tropical, dry climates and its ability to survive in near-desert conditions, thus making the cattle an ideal match for St. Croix' climate. Today, the farm is well-known for its production of high quality Senepol beef, which is both consumed locally and exported to world markets.

Castle Nugent Farms contains a cluster of buildings from the colonial plantation era including a great house that dates from the plantation's establishment, a converted chapel, the remains of a sugar mill, slave quarters, and a converted cotton storage shed. The buildings are situated in close proximity to each other on a hill with views towards the Caribbean Sea. The current owner lives on-site and also operates the buildings and grounds as a bed and breakfast. According to the owner, other cultural resources on the grounds include recent discoveries of pottery shards and other artifacts left over from either slave shanties or Arawak Indian campsites.

If authorized by Congress, and if funds are made available, a study would be able to determine if the resources present at Castle Nugent Farms are nationally significant, if the site would be a suitable and feasible addition to the National Park System, whether direct NPS management or alternative protection by other public agencies or the private sector is appropriate for the site, and what management alternative would be most effective and efficient in protecting the resources and allowing for public enjoyment of the site.

That concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.

**Proposed Amendments**  
**H.R. 318, Castle Nugent Farms Study**

Insert a new subsection (c) as follows and redesignate the existing subsection (c) as subsection (d).

“(c) MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES. — In completing the study authorized in subsection (b), the Secretary shall examine whether the National Park Service, the territorial government, or other public or private groups will be the most appropriate entity to provide for the management and preservation of Castle Nugent Farms.”